

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

Also by T. L. Vaswani

KRISHNA : THE SAVIOUR
KRISHNA'S FLUTE
THE ANCIENT MURLI
MY MASTER
THE DIVINE SPARK
RELIGION AND CULTURE
WISDOM OF THE RISHIS
DIARY OF A DISCIPLE
GLIMPSES
THE VISION OF INDIA
ATMAGNAN OR LIFE IN THE SPIRIT
THE SECRET OF ASIA
A PILGRIM'S FAITH
THUS HAVE I LEARNT
BUILDERS OF TOMORROW
MY MOTHERLAND
APOSTLES OF FREEDOM
VOICES
SPIRIT OF HINDU CULTURE
BODHI DHARMA
YOUTH AND THE COMING RENAISSANCE
IN THE SIKH SANCTUARY
QUEST (*Poems*)
YOUTH AND THE NATION
WITNESS OF THE ANCIENT
AWAKE! YOUNG INDIA!
THE ARYAN IDEAL
MESSAGE OF THE BIRDS
DESERT VOICES
INDIA'S ADVENTURE
KRISHNA : STORIES AND PARABLES
GITA : MEDITATIONS
A PROPHET OF THE PEOPLE
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE BUDDHA
SAINT MIRA
TUKARAM : POET AND PROPHET

The Face of the Buddha

By
T. L. VASWANI

MIRA UNION
10 CONNAUGHT ROAD,
POONA, [INDIA].

Printed by H. P. Vaswani from Turf Printing Work
31 Tribhuvan Road, Bombay - 4, and published by him
from Mira Union, 10 Connaught Road, Poona - 1.

DEDICATED TO
ASOKA THE GREAT

Teacher of Righteousness (*Dhamma*),
who held the Throne of India
and built Asia's biggest State
in the Law of Service to the poor and lowly
and of Compassion to bird and beast.

T. L. VASWANI

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
THE HOLY HERMIT	27
THE LEELA OF HIS LIFE	30
IN THE FOREST	45
ON THE VAISAKHI NIGHT	52
TUNE THE SITAR NEITHER LOW NOR HIGH!	67
BLESSED ARE THEY WHO WALK THE WAY	77
TO KAPILA	89
THREE BASKETS	96
"AS A LAMP INTO DARKNESS!"	104
GLOSSARY	113

INTRODUCTION

How may I tell of the wonder of the Buddha? I have seen it in statues and stone figures and carved pictures of the Blessed One,—sometime preaching to primitive peoples, sometimes speaking to birds and beasts, to trees and flowers, often seated in meditation,—always calm, *bodhi*-filled, radiant with wisdom, compassion.

This wisdom is immediate, intuitive perception of Truth. Truth is not theoretical. Truth is the crown of life well lived,—of true life. And life is not true until it is freed from desire, *tanha*, appetite, craving. This true life grows out of meditation or communion with "Being". The world's suffering is due to the world's wandering in "Becoming".

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

Many paintings and pictures have I seen of the Buddha. And meditating on them, I have begun to know something of the joy and healing the Buddha brought to multitudes of men and women. The Buddha has been a Healer of mankind.

On the birthday of the Buddha, Buddhist children sing a pretty, little song, as they move in processions, bestrewing flowers. The children sing:—

*In fair Lumbini's Garden
The Royal Babe was born,—
The bringer of salvation
Unto a world forlorn!*

India, indeed, was forlorn : she no longer remembered her sages. As we look into the mists of time and gaze back at the Blessed One, we find that, in that period of her history, India had declined in strength and wisdom. Prince fought against prince. The Buddha saw that India was divided : he saw that India was face to face with forces of conflict and disintegration.

In a beautiful picture which I saw in a quiet *vihara* in Lanka, many years ago, there stood the gracious figure of the Buddha in the centre. I

INTRODUCTION

gazed, again and again, at the Buddha's radiant Face, and I said to myself:—"How the Buddha shines and shows the Way!" In the picture, the Buddha shows to two contending armies the Way to peace. The Buddha says:—

*In this world of strife and hate,
Live ye with hearts filled with sympathy.
Give love for hate
And build the world for peace!*

The Buddha was a Preacher of Sympathy, Brotherhood and Peace.

There were, in the Buddha's time, "sceptics" who taught that men were slaves to "chance" and that "fate" determined everything, regardless of "merit" The Buddha gave his great message of "*Dhamma*" or the "Law", which men must obey if they would be truly happy.

Again, there were many who were entangled in theories of "metaphysics" and "philosophy". The Buddha said:—"Do not waste your energies in speculations and discussions." Limit philosophy, he said, to practical pursuits : and the most practical of pursuits was peace. There were *parivrajakas*,

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

too,—“wanderers” who taught logic as the “art of proving anything!” Many of them were called “hair-splitters”. Halls and lanes, the very streets of *tapobanas* rang with angry discussions : and many went so far as to say that religion was an aberration, a disease, and that morality was merely a social convention and convenience. The Buddha said:—
“Build your lives in Truth!”

The Buddha was a seer. “I have seen,” he said, “the Way, the Ancient Way.” The Buddha interpreted it as the “Middle Eightfold Path”. This Path is not one of rites and ceremonies, but of *inner discipline*. When the flame of desires is extinguished, you attain to *nirvana*, freedom, liberation. And you attain when selfish individualism is destroyed and sympathy, spiritual calm and purity are awakened.

When asked what were the characteristics of a true Brahmin, the Buddha said:—“He is a true Brahmin who is free from pride, impurity and selfishness and is a seeker of Wisdom and Holiness.”

On one occasion, the Buddha was asked “four questions”, which he answered thus:—

Question:—What is the best thing men possess?

INTRODUCTION

Answer:—Faith.

Question:—What is the source of man's truest happiness?

Answer:—*Dhamma*, Law.

Question:—What is the sweetest of the sweet?

Answer:—Truth.

Question:—What is the mark of the noblest life?

Answer:—Insight.

The Buddha's aim was practical. The remedy for the world's sorrow, he taught, was the utter destruction of desires,—even of the desire for salvation.

“Among the nations I shall go!” said the Buddha. History bears witness to the truth of his words.

The Buddha entered into India's life and transformed it, specially in the periods of her two great kings,—Asoka and Harsha. Both became disciples of the Buddha : both were deeply influenced by the Buddha's teaching of non-violence and compassion. Asoka confessed that he was converted to the Buddhist Faith after witnessing

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

horrors of military conquest. Asoka saw how, during the wars he waged, many individuals,—non-combatants, peaceful Brahmins,—fell victims to violence. At last he realised that “the only true conquest was conquest by *Dhamma*”. Asoka’s “understanding heart” swiftly saw that the essence of *Dhamma* was righteous living, social service and welfare of the people.

Compassion awoke in Asoka’s heart : a sense of social service seized him. He became new. He made India a vital nation. Asoka gave new roads to the people. Asoka had innumerable wells dug up. Under Asoka’s orders, trees were planted, public gardens were opened, hospitals for men and animals were created and medicinal herbs were planted in many places. Asoka became a protector of “minorities” : he realised that in all creatures and communities was the working of the One Life. Asoka organised education for women,—education of the true type built in the ideal of *Dhamma*, righteousness.

And Asoka sent missionaries of the “Religion of Righteous Living” to Persia, Ceylon and Kashmir. He sent missionaries as far as Alexandria. Did Buddhist missionaries influence the thought

INTRODUCTION

and teaching of Christian preachers? The Buddha and the Christ, both were, I believe, in communion with One Central Source of Illumination : and it is easy to see similarities between the Buddha's teaching and the message of the Christ. Arresting, indeed, are the words of the Buddha to his disciples:—

*Overcome anger by kindness!
Conquer evil by good!
Victory, O bhikkhus, breeds hatred :
For the "conquered" feel unhappy.
Never in the world, O bhikkhus!
Doth hatred cease by hatred!
Hatred ceaseth by Love!*

Asoka's rock-edicts show that the great king was filled, through and through, with the spirit of the Master's teaching.

Harsha, like Asoka, embraced the Law of the Buddha. Harsha was a statesman and a peace-maker. Like Asoka, Harsha was a saint on the throne. He infused the laws and customs of India with the spirit of gentleness and compassion.

At the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna, in the great plain of Prayag (now named

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

Allahabad), the king's capital, Harsha summoned every five years a Conference, an "Assembly of Deliverance", where he gave richly to the poor, the lame, the blind and the orphan. Everyday, for a month, he fed thousands of Brahmins and Buddhist monks. To a crowd of five hundred thousand people collected by the king's officers, Harsha gave alms,—corn and cash, silver and gold. The king gave away the very garments he wore and his necklaces, ear-rings and bracelets. After putting away all his riches, he asked his sister for a common, worn-out garment and wearing it, he folded his hands and prayed:—

I take refuge in the Buddha!

I take refuge in the Dhamma, the Law!

*I take refuge in the Sangha, the
Community!*

He came to be called "Siladitya", the "Sun of Virtue". He restored unity and peace to India. This great peacemaker, alas! was the last emperor of Independent India. Like Asoka, he ordered that the slaughter of animals be stopped. He re-organised the administration of towns and villages.

INTRODUCTION

Many houses of public relief were built. Food, drink and medicines were given in charity to travellers and to the poor and needy. Like Asoka, too, Harsha showed a beautiful spirit of tolerance in his administration, honouring all creeds and all communities.

Outside India, the Buddha's message travelled to Japan and touched her poetry and music, her crafts and arts. The Buddha's teaching travelled to China, too. Buddhist missionaries went from India to China and gave the great message to kings and the people.

The Master's message brought India and China into contact with each other and both India and China glowed with a rich life of culture. In the seventh century, too, travelled from China to India the Buddhist pilgrim, Hsuan-Tsang. He was so young,—only twenty-six years old,—and yet so rich in the Wisdom of the East. Rightly was he called the "Master of the Law (*Dhamma*)". He studied and he appreciated Hindu philosophy. And the mysticism of the "Nirvana-sutra" and the idealism of the Mahayana doctrine filled him with such joy that in studying them he forgot to eat or sleep! In this Chinese mystic of the seventh century,

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

Buddhist compassion and Confucian courtesy were blended with the holy wisdom of the Hindu *rishis*. His voice, we read, was pure and penetrating in quality : and his heart was tender as his adventure to India was heroic.

The Buddha's message travelled, also, to Burma and Syria and Central Asia, to Egypt and Greece, to Rome and Mexico : the Buddhist *Dhamma* carried from place to place its torch of culture and civilisation. The Buddha entered, also, into the life of Ceylon. Asoka's son, Mahinda, we are told, left his palace to be a *bhikkhu* (mendicant) of the Buddha : he spread far and wide the message of his Master. Rightly is Mahinda worshipped as a saint in Ceylon. It was an impressive procession I saw there, carrying the saint's Image and dropping flowers on it in wondrous devotion.

The Buddha has influenced, too, the thought of some vital thinkers in the West,—of Schopenhauer in Germany, of Comte in France, of Emerson in America.

The Buddha announced the Way : it is the Way of quenching sorrow. On one occasion, he

INTRODUCTION

indicated his teaching in a few significant words:—
"Quench the flames!" The Buddha pointed out that the "flames" were three:— (1) the flame of greed; (2) the flame of the "ego", the "I"; and (3) the flame of hate.

Srima, the courtesan sought by princes and millionaires came in contact with the Buddha. To her the Master gave his message and his blessings. Srima was transformed. She became a devotee of the Buddha.

Angulimala was a robber who murdered people to cut off their fingers for his garland : he needed one more finger to complete his *mala* (garland). He saw the Buddha and brandishing the sword rushed upon the Blessed One. The Buddha retreated slowly. Angulimala pursued the Buddha but was unable to reach him. Angulimala was a confirmed criminal : but on him had the Buddha looked with favour, and the robber was converted! Angulimala became a disciple of the Buddha and ended his life as a hermit.

There was a sick monk living in isolation apart from the *Bhikkhu* Brotherhood. The Buddha saw the monk and said to him:—"Why do you live apart?"

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

The monk said:—"Sir! I haven't the courage to consult a doctor. Very ill am I, it is true, and there is none to care for me."

Then said the Compassionate One:—"I will be your doctor!"

And the Buddha touched the monk and dressed his wound and served him. The monk was healed.

The Buddha preached even to robbers and wild men : he preached and he converted them!

The story of this marvellous man who wrought his miracles of mercy passed from the Caucasian language to the Greek and thence to Latin as the "Story of Barlaam and Jesophat". The teaching of the Buddha has appeared in translations into Tibetan, Chinese and Turkish languages and in several dialects in India. In a museum in Russia lies still unpublished the text of many of the "Sayings and Parables and Dialogues" of the Buddha.

The Buddha taught his disciples to see the One Life in all and to respect the least among the lowly, and the lost.

Ananda, passing one day by a well and seeing an "untouchable" girl drawing water, asks her for water to drink.

She humbly says:—"O thou of noble birth!

I am an untouchable. How can I give thee water to drink?"

Ananda answers:—"Caste matters nothing to me. I ask for water."

She gives him water to drink. He drinks it with joy.

On learning that Ananda is a disciple of Gautama Buddha, she goes to the Blessed One and says to him:—"Master! teach me the Way of *Dhamma*."

And the Buddha says to her:—"Blessed art thou! I teach thee the *Dhamma* of compassion and service."

The Buddha lived to the age of eighty years. Forty-five of these years he spent in teaching : in his heart was a longing to see that the people would know the cause of sorrow and strive to conquer sorrow and pass into the Great Peace. So he preached to the very last day of his earth-life. He preached and he healed,—the lame, the deaf and the blind.

The Buddha taught that he who would attain to joy and peace must get rid of his "fever" of life. I recall the prayer of the *rishi* in an ancient Upanishad:—"Out of darkness lead me into Light!"

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

May I not sum up the deepest aspiration of the Buddha's life in the words:—"Out of suffering and pain pass ye into Joy and Peace"?

The passing of the Buddha has been called the great "Quenching". The story of the "Quenching" is a moving one. Gautama Buddha is reclining on his bed when, turning to the *bhikkhus*, he discloses his aged body to emphasise that the world is transient. We read the following in an ancient account:—

The Lord removed from his own body the upper garment and said to the *bhikkhus*:—

Look, bhikkhus!

*Look upon the body of the Tathagata!**

Look well upon this body!

A sight of the Tathagatas,—

The Buddhas,—

Is as hard to meet

As is the flower of a fig!

* Buddha. The literal meaning of the word *Tathagata* is "One whose way of life conforms to That, the Real".

INTRODUCTION

O bhikkhus!

Look upon this body,

And show your approval by your silence.

All forces of existence

Are conditioned by extinction!

A Japanese Buddhist of the twelfth century expresses this thought of the fleeting nature of the world (*samsara*) in significant words thus:—

The river flows,

And the water is not the same,

But varies every moment.

The foam floats on the pool

And the foam vanishes

And forms again,

But is never lasting.

Such, too, is the fate of men :

Some die in the morning,

Some are born at night!

None knows whence they come

Nor whither they go!

Like the dew on the flower in the morn

Man and his dwellings pass away

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

*In this brief, fleeting life.
The dew-drops fall off the flower,
Leaving the flower behind!
And the flower, too, will fade .
In the morning sun :
Does the flower wither and the dew re-
main?*

*Remember, the dew will, also, go :
The dew will vanish
Before the evening is gone!*

Most moving is the Buddhist *sutra* which says:—.

*Thus shall ye think
Of all this fleeting world:—
A star at dawn,
A bubble on a stream,
A flash of lightning
On a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp,
A phantom and a dream!*

Yes,—all is transient, but not “unreal”. For this, too, is taught by the *bhaktas* (devotees) of the Buddha that in all dwells the Buddha,—the

INTRODUCTION

Indwelling *Tathagata* (Reality).

In the Heart within is the Buddha. To his *bhaktas*, verily, the Buddha is a Living Presence. Years ago, I read the moving story of the Japanese Buddhist, Nichiren, prophet and seer. Five thousand temples are dedicated to him in Japan. They persecuted him : in the midst of persecution and loneliness, his faith in the Buddha never wavered. It sustained him : and ever the thought was in his heart that his mission was blessed by the Buddha.

In his volumes on the "Study of History", Dr. Toynbee emphasises two main ideas. Civilisations, he says, die (1) when men lose faith; and (2) when men set up arms against one another. In the Buddha's teaching I see the beauty of these two fundamentals of true life:—(1) faith or "wisdom of the heart"; and (2) peace and brotherhood.

The Buddha's life was one of serenity blended with tremendous activity. The Buddha was a man intensely contemplative yet profoundly practical. And gazing at the calm repose of his face and looking into his eyes radiant with compassion, I repeat the words of the devotees of the Master:—

The Buddha is not afar!

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

*The Buddha dwells
In every little bit,
In every broken fragment
Of sand and stone.
And in the heart of everyone
Is the Holy Shrine!*

T. L. VASWANI

THE HOLY HERMIT

Over five and twenty centuries ago was he born of Maharani Maya, "pure as a water-lily". His father, Suddhodana, was a King.

In the royal Lumbini grove, midway between Kapilavastu and Devadaha, Queen Maya brought forth her child, Gautama. Born of the royal family of the Sakyas, Gautama came to be called Sakya-muni (the *Muni* or Sage of the Sakya Community). He has been named, also, Siddhartha (he who achieved or attained the Goal). Yet another name given him is Tathagata,—one who "came in the same way", i.e. like the Buddhas before him. But the name by which he is known to millions of mankind is "Buddha",—the "Enlightened One", the "Awakened One", the Master of Wisdom.

THE FACE OF THE BUDDHA

The royal father, radiant with joy, distributed alms among the poor and the helpless : and streets and bazars and houses and temples were decorated.

Asita was a *yogi*,—a holy hermit of the Himalayas, a grey-haired saint who lived near Kapilavastu. Wondrous was his knowledge of the Ancient Wisdom. He was a man of fasts and prayers. His ears heard, we read, in the hour of his meditation beneath the peepul-tree, the songs the Gods did sing at the Buddha's birth. Asita came to see the new-born babe. The King saluted the *Yogi* and Queen Maya in reverence did lay her babe before his holy feet.

Holy Asita took the Prince in his arms, touched the dust and said:—"O Babe! I worship thee! Thou art Divine! In thee I see the Light such as never was on earth or sea! I see the marks on thy foot-sole, and I exclaim:—"Thou art the Buddha foretold of ancient times! Thou art the destined Preacher of the Law (*Dhamma*)! And thou art he who cometh to help and heal! "

Then, turning to the King, the Saint said:—"O King! but once in many myriad years doth appear in the Garden of Humanity a flower such as he,—a flower whose fragrance filleth the world

THE HOLY HERMIT

from end to end."

Once again, Asita looked into Gautama's eyes, then sighed and wept.

"Why weepest thou, holy Hermit? Art thou not famed for wisdom and saintliness?" the King asked him.

And Asita answered thus:—"I weep, O King, because I shall not live to see the day that is to come,—the day when he, the Buddha, will teach the '*Good Law*' and bless the Nations of the Earth. I am old and I know my end is near!"

THE LEELA OF HIS LIFE

On Nine Pictures have I loved to meditate, as
I have dwelt in my mind on the life of the Buddha.

[1]

In the First Picture, we see Maharani Maya, the mother of Gautama. It is the time of rain-festival in Kapilavastu. Queen Maya is asleep and is dreaming a dream. In her dream she sees a beautiful young elephant, white as milk, descending from Heaven. On waking up, Maharani Maya feels that a Blessed One is coming. The white elephant is a symbol of gentleness. True it is, that Gautama was a picture of the gentle spirit. Gautama was a Teacher of